Rebecca, the Maasai Changemaker

based on a true story

by Olivia Wood
illustrations by Amit Mohanta





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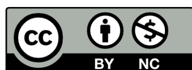
English

Rebecca, the Maasai Changemaker

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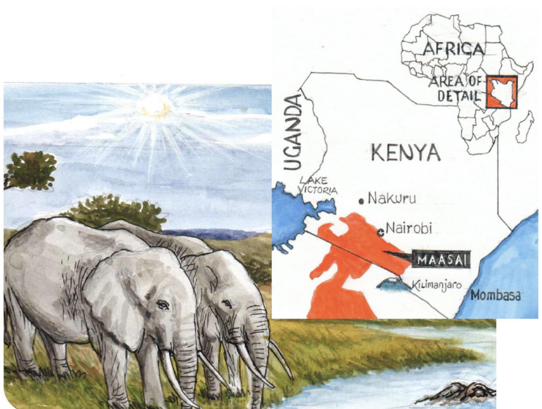
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In the land of the Maasai, in Southwest Kenya, there isa girl named Rebecca.

Rebecca lives near a large national park, where there are golden lions, and big grey elephants.

Rebecca's family keep cattle, sheep and goats and depend on farming the land for food for their animals. Rebecca goes to school and helps her family care for the animals when she is home.



One very hot day, Rebecca finds her mama[1] crying.

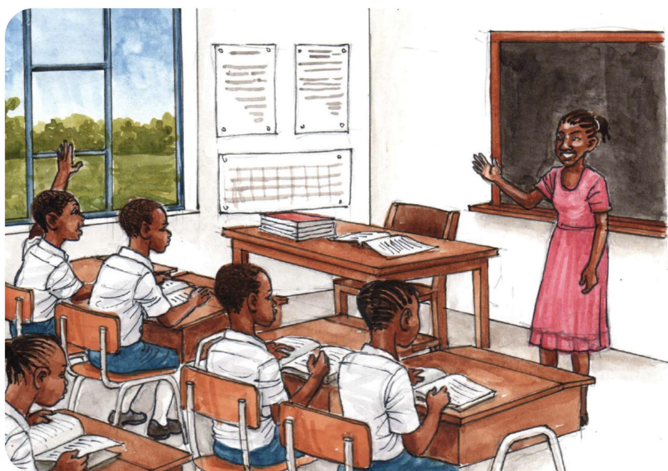
“Our crops have been bad this year,” she says.“Now our goats and sheep might die.”



1 'mama' is Kiswahili for mother

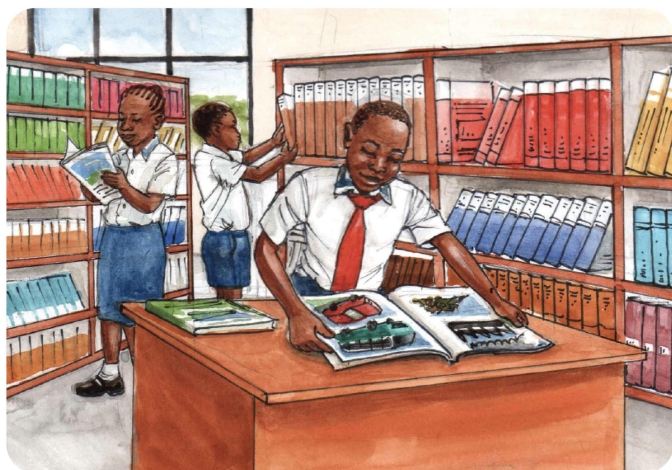
At school, Rebecca asks her teacher why there has been so little rain this year. “We have had many days without rain,” says her teacher.

“When we have no rain, plants cannot grow. Without plants to eat and water to drink, our animals die.” Everyone in the class is quiet. They are worried for their families, their animals, and their community.



At the school library, Rebecca searches for information about rain. What she learns is difficult. The whole world is getting hotter, and there is less rain. She learns a new term: “Climate Change.”

Cars, buses and airplanes are making the air dirty. Trees are being cut down, and used to make buildings. And trash is buried in the ground. All these things are harming nature.



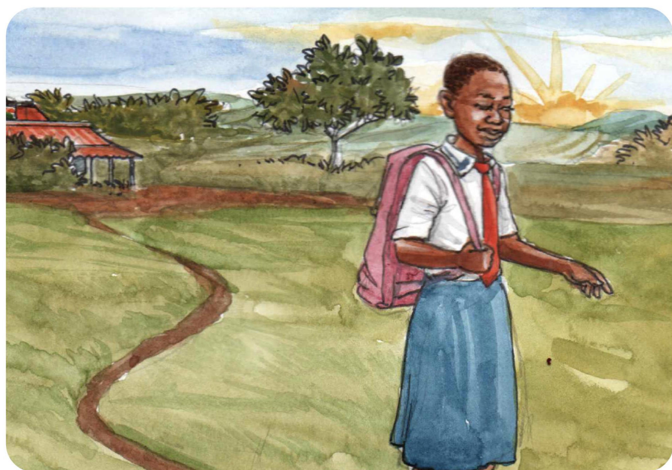
For the whole day Rebecca feels sad. What can just one girl do to help the whole world?

Rebecca decides to talk to her teacher about what she has learned. “It is a big problem for the earth,” her teacher explains. “But there are some things we can do to help, like planting trees to make nature stronger.”



As Rebecca walks home, it is hot and she stops to drink from her water bottle. She can't stop thinking about the lack of rain, and how she can help her community.

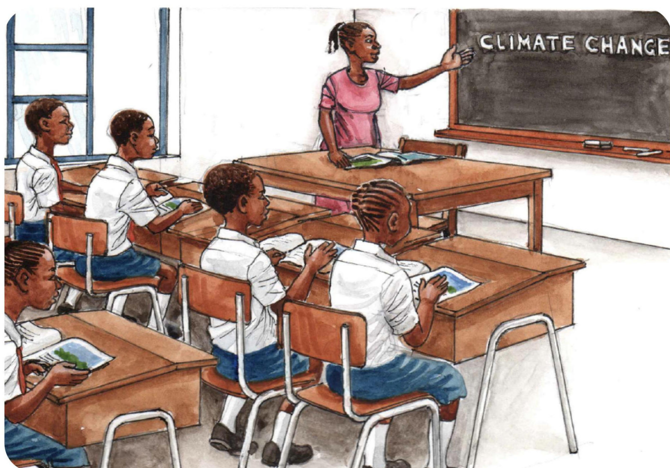
Then she has an idea. "I've learned so much about climate change," she thinks. "It would help if everyone knew about this problem!"



The next day Rebecca asks her teacher to give a lesson about the world's changing weather, and the damage humans are doing to nature.

At the end of the class, Rebecca stands up. She asks everyone in her class to go home, and teach their parents about what they have learned.

In just a few days, everyone is talking about how humans are harming nature.



One day, the Elders hold a meeting to talk with Rebecca about what can be done to help nature. The Elders' Shukas are bright red, and they have many bracelets on their heads and wrists.

The problem they face is so big. And most of the harm to nature is happening in big cities, far away from their community.

“Let’s write a letter to the President of Kenya,”one Elder says. “He needs to know that we cannot live with no rain. Then maybe he will make changes to our laws to stop harming nature.”



Rebecca takes the letter and shares it with her classmates. They each ask their families to sign their name at the bottom to show their support.



In Nairobi, the President reads the letter from the Maasai community. He has had many other letters, from other parts of the country. “I need to help Kenya protect nature,” he thinks.

In the Maasai community, everyone agrees to plant a tree outside their home. Rebecca and her Mother dig the hole together, and put the seedlings in the soil.



At Rebecca's school, the head teacher talks to all the students. They ask Rebecca to stand at the front.

"Protecting the environment is a big job - and everyone in the world has to help." The Principal says, "But we would like to thank Rebecca especially, for helping us learn and make a change. Imagine if we all helped our community!"

Rebecca is so happy. She already is thinking about what she and her friends can do next to help nature and her community.







Activity #1: Love My Neighbor
Age Group: 3-8
Skill: Empathy Communication
Materials: Chairs

Why? In order to solve problems, we need to understand the experiences of others with empathy. We must look beyond first impressions and superficial labels, and replace our projects and expectations with real understanding. It is important for us to feel connected to one another and feel valued.

How? The following game is a great way to uncover shared experiences among students, to deepen understanding of one another's background and interests, and to reinforce a sense of community. This game can be played in a classroom or at home.

1. Setup: Before starting the game, set up chairs in a circle facing each other. Make sure everyone understands that everyone will get a turn and that they need to be careful in racing for the seats. Invite everyone to sit in the chairs around the circle.

2. Play game: Play begins when the designated player, standing in the middle of the circle, makes a statement that is true about him or herself. For example: "I love my neighbor who has a little brother." Everyone seated for whom this statement is true must stand and move to a chair not directly next to them. The person in the middle is also looking for a chair, thus leaving one participant without a chair.

That person moves to the middle and continues the game by making a statement that is true about him or herself.

For example, "I love my neighbor who speaks Spanish" or "I love my neighbor who loves to play soccer."

The game continues so that everyone gets at least one turn to make a statement.

3. Reflect: Talk about your experience in the game.•What did you learn about the other people?•Were you surprised when people jumped up for certain prompts?•How did it feel to be up there alone?•How did it feel when you discovered others shared your experience.

Activity #2: Hope is All Around Me
Age Group: 5-12
Skill: Empathy, Confidence
Materials: Paper and pencil or camera

Why? Many times, we forget to appreciate the little things that surround us and give our lives meaning. Changemakers don't only spot problems, but they see opportunity. Changemakers are driven by hope, not fear or anger.

How? This week-long challenge is to look for five things that bring you joy each day. By doing this, you will begin to see the immense potential that surrounds you, as well as the immense potential within yourself.

Every day, write down, draw, or take a photo of something that brings you joy. Think about: What makes you smile? Does this thing make others smile? Why do you feel joy?

For example: Every Friday, you and your friends pick up a snack on the way home from school. It is a fun way to see all of your friends and enjoy a delicious treat! Take a photo of your friends with your snacks.

End of the Week Reflection
Talk with a friend or family member. Share with them everything that brought you joy! What did you learn about yourself and your community?

Activity #3: Feel, Imagine, Do, Share
Age Group: 5-15
Skill: Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving
Materials: Piece of paper, pencil

Why?Empathy can be cultivated through observation and reflection. For example, writing down takeaways can help young people internalize what they have learned. Feeling-related questions can help young people recognize and communicate their emotions with others. Imagining a better world can help young people think beyond themselves. This activity can be done independently or with a group.

How?
Step 1: Feel. Start by identifying a problem you wish to address. Write down all the situations and behaviors that bother you in your home, school, or community.

After writing down several problems, ask the following questions: What seems to be the problem? What patterns doyou see? How do these problems make you feel? How doesthis problem make others feel?

Repeat this activity each day for a week.

Step 2: Imagine. Next comes the ideation phase. Taking what you have observed, think about how the problem affects others.

Discuss: Who did you see as the people involved in the experience? What stands out to you? Why?

Now it's time to brainstorm a solution. The more ideas, the better! There is no judgement in brainstorming. Write down ideas as they come.

Discuss: How can we fix this problem? What can we do differently? What are different ways we can combine certain ideas to make them even better?

Step 3: Do. Review all of your ideas. Circle or vote on your favorite ideas. Which idea excites you the most? Now you're ready to take action. Here you're aiming for an idea that is easy to implement, not an idea that is perfect. Try implementing your idea and focus on the end-user rather than the product.

Think through the following:1) What does it look like?2) What does it feel like?3) How does it work?

Step 4: Share. Share with others your solution. Get their ideas on what works, what doesn't work, and how it could be improved. Challenge them to come up with an idea, too!

Meet Rebecca:



Rebecca is a changemaker from Kenya, activating her classmates atTembea Girls' Academy and community to be allies for the environment through education, advocacy and action. Rebecca and her classmates share the urgency of protecting the environment and practical steps to take action, such as writing letters and petitions to government officials.

Rebecca's school was established by BEADS for Education, a nonprofit that aspires to enable young women like Rebecca to thrive through education and business development.

Rebecca's mentor or sponsor, Cynthia Moss, the founder of Amboseli Trust for Elephants, inspires her to be compassionate and attentive for every living thing. Relentlessly striving for a better world, Rebecca says, "If I do succeed in my venture, the world will be beautiful. The cattle will be fat, the children well nourished, there will be many more trees, the markets will be full of farmers' produce and the wild animals will be many."

About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the ability to adapt to and drive change is essential for everyone to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Ashoka is building a global community that is laying the foundation for a world where everyone is a changemaker. At the heart of the Everyone a Changemaker movement is a vision to transform the way children and young people grow up so everyone has the power and skillset to create change for the good of all.

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About Worldreader

Worldreader believes that readers build a better world. We work with partners globally to support vulnerable and underserved communities with digital reading solutions that help improve literacy and learning outcomes for children.

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Rebecca, The Maasai Changemaker is inspired by the true story of a young girl in Kenya who was alarmed by the signs of climate change in her community. She educated herself about the problem, then galvanized her community and the government to take action.

This children's picture book is the result of a collaboration between Ashoka and Worldreader. It is intended to inspire children everywhere to become Changemakers and encourage adults everywhere to support them in their journey.

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